



## Muscle Strain of the Calf (Gastrocnemius / Soleus Strain)



### Overview

This common injury is a stretching or tearing of the gastrocnemius or soleus muscles of the lower leg. One or both muscles may be affected.

### Anatomy

The gastrocnemius is the calf's large muscle. The soleus is a smaller muscle beneath the gastrocnemius, slightly lower on the leg. These muscles join to form the Achilles tendon. They help flex the ankle and point the foot downward.

### Causes

Calf strains commonly occur during athletic activity. Movements such as jumping and pivoting can put great stress on these muscles, causing injury. Calf strains can also be caused by overuse. They can occur during running, or even during walking, especially in people who do not condition properly before exercise.

### Symptoms

Symptoms of a calf muscle strain may vary depending on the severity of the injury. Typically, a person who strains the calf will experience a sudden, sharp pain or popping sensation in the back of the leg. A mild strain may result in minor pain, tightness and soreness in the calf. A moderate strain may result in more pain, along with swelling and bruising. A moderate strain may interfere with a person's ability to run or jump. A severe strain can cause intense pain, bruising and swelling. A person who has a severe strain may not be able to walk at all.

### Treatment

Treatment options may include rest, ice, compression wraps and anti-inflammatory medications. Physical therapy or massage therapy may also be recommended. A severe tear or a complete rupture may require a brace or surgery.